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### Historiography on the Jews in the 'Talmudic Period' (70-640 ce)

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### Abstract and Keywords

This article presents a narrative history of the Jews between the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) and the Arab conquest of Palestine (c.640 CE). After the destruction, Palestine was made into a standard Roman province in a way which at least curtailed the Jews' traditional autonomy. Nevertheless, the Jews rebelled again, with disastrous results. The Diaspora Revolt (115-17 CE) seems to have ended in the decimation or destruction of the Jewish settlements in Egypt, Libya, and several other places, while the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132-5) brought an end to the Jews' hopes for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple and, more tangibly, to Jewish settlement in the district of Judaea. The historiography of the past sixty years on the Jews in the 'Talmud period' can be divided into two very broad tendencies, which may be designated Israeli and non-Israeli.

Keywords: Talmud Period, Second Temple, Palestine, Diaspora Revolt, Jewish settlements, historiography, Judaea, Bar Kokhba Revolt

## Introduction: History of the Jews in the Talmud Period

FEW<sup>1</sup> scholars nowadays would attempt a narrative history of the Jews between the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE) and the Arab conquest of Palestine (c.640 CE), for reasons which will be explored later in this essay. Nevertheless, on some issues there is broad if not universal consensus. After the destruction, Palestine was made into a standard Roman province in a way which at least curtailed and perhaps abrogated the Jews' traditional, if partial, autonomy. The tax of two drachmas per annum once paid to the Jerusalem Temple was now paid to the Roman state and used to rebuild the temple of Capitoline Jupiter in Rome. Nevertheless, the Jews rebelled again, with disastrous results.

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Libya, and several other places, while the Bar Kokhba Revolt (132–5) brought an end to the Jews' hopes for the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple and, more tangibly, to Jewish settlement in the district of Judaea.

A much reduced Jewish population was now concentrated in Galilee, and of diaspora communities, the most important in the Roman Empire were now in Asia Minor and Italy. By far the largest diaspora communities, though, were situated in Central Mesopotamia, under Parthian and later Sassanian (neo-Persian) rule.

Though the Babylonian Talmud leaves little doubt about the ever greater importance and distinctiveness of these communities, it provides little readily useful historical information, even about the fourth through sixth Centuries, when the Talmud largely took form.

In Palestine, the period after Bar Kokhba is also rather obscure. We can, though, say something about the gradual coalescence of a rabbinic movement—probably consisting originally of the scattered remnants of the priests, scribes, and Pharisees of the Second Temple period—under the leadership of a dynast eventually called a 'patriarch' or, in Hebrew, *nasi*. While the rabbis probably enjoyed some prestige as arbitrators, legal experts, and preachers, they had for several Centuries no state support and must have found it difficult to compete for legal and religious authority and cultural prestige with local Greek cities and other mediators of imperial power.

This may have begun to change when the Roman Empire gradually became Christian, in the course of the fourth century. The patriarchate had probably begun its rise c.200 CE, in the administration of Rabbi Judah I, but acquired its highest rank and greatest authority only under the Christian emperors, in the late fourth century, when the patriarchs were more powerful and enjoyed higher rank in the Constantinopolitan senate than the governors of Palestine. The growing power of the patriarchs may explain why their office was abolished around 425. In the same period, rabbis and similar Jewish religious officials first acquired limited jurisdiction over the Jews, and the local Jewish community was for the first time since the destruction of the Temple recognized as a licit corporation.

Gradually, though, theologically motivated hostility, encouraged by some bishops and monastics, came to influence imperial attitudes. The effects of this shift were not immediately or everywhere apparent. In both Palestine and the diaspora, archaeology demonstrates not only the Jews' relative prosperity in the fifth and sixth Centuries, but also the emergence of a new religious culture, characterized by the construction of elaborately decorated synagogues even in small settlements, and by the introduction of such new literary forms as the *piyyut*, the midrash collection, and even the Talmud. At the

same time, perhaps especially in the eastern part of the Roman Empire (the Western Empire fell in 476), pressure on the Jews probably increased dramatically in the course of the sixth century. When first the Persians (in 614) and then the Arabs (in 634) invaded Syria and Palestine, surprisingly few people, even among the Christians, offered any resistance; but some Jews actively joined the invading forces.

### (p. 81) **Historiography**

The historiography of the past sixty years on the Jews in the 'Talmud period' can be divided into two very broad tendencies, which may be designated Israeli and non-Israeli. Some of the characteristics that seem retrospectively definitive of 'Israeli' scholarship—especially a tendency toward a highly positivistic or, to borrow an expression from C. E. Hayes, 'naively historicizing' approach to rabbinic literature—in fact were widely shared before c.1970. But Israeli and earlier Zionist scholarship had a set of often quite self-conscious concerns which went far beyond a preference for positivistic reading of rabbinic literature and which served to distinguish it from non-Zionist scholarship. Most essentially, Zionist and Israeli scholarship was far more concerned with history than its diaspora counterparts. This was of course implicit in its nationalist project—on the common romantic assumption that only nations truly had histories (whereas religions, for example, had textual canons and evolving theologies: Myers 1995: 5-6). Furthermore, Israeli and non-Israeli scholarship have generally been founded on quite distinct social and cultural-historical assumptions. These differences have prevailed for most of the twentieth century and continue to be important today, and so constitute the primary topic of this essay.<sup>2</sup>

## **Zionist and Israeli Scholarship: Dlnur and Kaufmann**

The predecessors of the Zionists in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums* movement had laboured to generate a specifically historical consciousness among their acculturating Jewish supporters and readers (Schorsch 1994: 177-204; Roemer 2000). Like other romantics, they wished to discover and collect lost or neglected documents and monuments, and make sense of them contextually, primarily through comparative philology.<sup>3</sup> Though this endeavour yielded several pioneering pieces of historiography, there is no question that, especially for the period under consideration, the main concern of these scholars was not history but textual scholarship. The simple and compelling reason for this was that their work served primarily a (p. 82) religious and communal need: they wished to demonstrate to the German and Austro-Hungarian authorities that Judaism was not contemptible, so the Jews merited emancipation, and to the Jews that Jewish tradition itself validated the introduction of religious reforms. The most effective way to prove these points was through contextualized reading of texts (Schorsch 1994: 177-204).

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Accordingly, one of the most remarkable and problematic features of Heinrich Graetz's history was his view that with the destruction of the Second Temple the Jews no longer even had a proper history, or at most, had a surpassingly odd one:

If you wish to sketch a clear, adequate picture of this period [70–1780 CE], you can do so in the form of a diptych. On one side, Judah enslaved, his walking-stick in his hand, his pilgrim's bundle on his back, his gloomy features turned to heaven, encircled by prisonwalls, the implements of martyrdom, and the glowing iron of the brand. On the other side, the same figure with a thinker's earnestness visible on his luminous brow, the demeanour of a research-scholar in his radiant face,<sup>4</sup> in a classroom, filled with a vast library in all the languages of man and touching on all branches of divine and human science: the appearance of a slave with the pride of a thinker.<sup>5</sup>

Similarly, in his introduction to what Graetz himself called the 'talmudische Zeit', he observes: 'At the beginning of this period, one can still discern the striving to restore yet again a lost political life. This striving generated clashes, uprisings, wars and new defeats. But soon the political movement retreated, only to leave in its wake full scope for purely spiritual activity.' At first, mainstream Zionist historical thought accepted Graetz's view that Jewish national self-determination and so a specifically national and political Jewish history came to an end more or less in 70 CE (Myers 1988). But Ben Zion Dinur argued forcefully in the introduction to the first volume of *Yisrael Ba-Golah*, published in 1926, that the 'Diaspora period' began not in 70, as had been universally thought, but around 640, with the Arab conquest of Palestine.<sup>6</sup> 'It would be easy enough to demonstrate that the true "exile" (of the nation as a historical-communal entity, not of its individual members) begins only from the moment that the Land of Israel Ceases to be a Jewish land'—a quality which has both a political and a demographic dimension. For Dinur, Palestine's loss of its Jewish character was a Centuries-long process. Though the political and demographic elements of this process were not synchronous, the Arab conquest seemed a serviceable, if admittedly rather artificial, boundary line (Dinur 1958: 5-7; 1969: 3-6).

Rejected, in this scheme, is Graetz's periodization by book—in which even the amoraic *sof hora'ah* (literally, 'the end of instruction', probably meaning the end of (p. 83) original and authoritative amoraic legal teaching, traditionally dated to c.500), for example, constitutes a meaningful historical boundary marker—replaced by politics, demography, and land tenure, the real stuff of history. The history of the Jews is here primarily a national history, and the history of the Jewish nation in turn remains primarily the history of a land, as long as the land remained Jewish, even if more Jews lived outside Palestine than in it.

In the 1920s, as later, there were other voices in the Zionist yishuv. One of the most compelling belonged to Yehezkel Kaufmann, who in his *Golah Ve-Nekhar* (published 1929–32) approached the problem of the endurance of Jewish nationhood in the absence of political sovereignty with an intellectual rigour and concentrated theoretical sophistication reminiscent of the best German sociology of the period (Kaufmann had immigrated from Berlin in 1928), but in short supply in Zionist scholarship outside the

works of Gershom Scholem.<sup>7</sup> Kaufmann was little interested, at least in this book, in questions of periodization or territory, and was mainly concerned to investigate the role of religion in the formation and maintenance of a distinctive Jewish group, even in the absence of the material conditions which were normally (and Certainly by most Zionists) regarded as essential for national existence. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given what must have seemed to some of his readers to be Kaufmann's devaluing of the national element in Judaism, *Golah Ve-Nekhar* had little detectable influence on the Zionist historiography of the Talmud period (but see below), whereas his ultra-romantic and extremely problematic *Toledot Ha-Emunah Ha-Yisre'elit* (published 1937-56) shaped Jewish biblical scholarship both in Israel and elsewhere.<sup>8</sup>

## Alon and Urbach

In fact, the work of Gedalyah Alon (1901, or in some accounts, 1902-50) and his followers, which eventually emerged as the mainstream of Israeli scholarship, can be viewed as a detailed elaboration of Dinur's basic ideas about the character of Jewish national life after the Destruction. Thus, the introduction to Alon's lecture notes, (p. 84) published in English in 1980 as *The Jews in their Land in the Talmudic Age*,<sup>9</sup> is basically a paraphrase of the first chapter of *Yisrael Ba-Golah*, with a few additions which will be mentioned below.

Alon's *Mehkarim*, containing articles and reviews published between 1934 and Alon's death, in addition to a few pieces he left unpublished, provides evidence of real distinction (Alon 1957; 1977). Alon's approach was shared by such rabbinically trained contemporaries as Saul Lieberman, Ephraim Elimelech Urbach, Louis Finkelstein, and many others in the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s, and was little changed from that used by scholars of the previous generation, including Adolph Büchler (e.g. Büchler 1906)—whom Alon especially admired—Victor Aptowitzer, Louis Ginzberg (esp. Ginzberg 1909-38), and Samuel Krauss (Krauss 1948).<sup>10</sup> This work proceeded by using the history of halachah and somewhat more tentatively that of rabbinic biblical exegesis, in addition to 'historical' tales in the Talmud and midrashim, subjected to careful comparative analysis intended to aid in the extraction of the stories' historical kernel, in a fairly direct way to reconstruct political, social, and economic history. Alon was indubitably one of the best practitioners of this method, and the most historically sophisticated. In his eulogy of Alon, the great medievalist Yitzhak Baer reported Alon's ambition to be the Mommsen of Jewish history (Theodor Mommsen was a pioneering historian of Roman law, upon which he relied heavily for his reconstruction of Roman political and social history).<sup>11</sup> But what really distinguished him from his colleagues was his flexibility and eclecticism in interpreting rabbinic sources, on full display in his long critique of Finkelstein (1936) (Alon 1957:181-227). Although Alon often sought to explain halachah against a background of political and social change, he acknowledged that not all halachic change could be accounted for in this way, that rabbinic law and exegesis had its own dynamics of development, literary context, and so on. Similarly, though Alon may have slightly misread, or over-read, Lieberman's argument about the diffusion and significance of

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Graeco-Roman culture in Palestine, and was deeply convinced a priori of the Jews' ingrained tendency to cultural self-enclosure,<sup>12</sup> the views he set out in response to Lieberman (wealthy Palestinian Jews were not all highly literate in Greek, rural common folk may have had little knowledge of the language, political and social pressures pushed the Jews in opposite cultural directions (p. 85) simultaneously) reflect a nuanced and attractively complex grasp of the sorts of cultural changes produced by the imposition of direct Roman rule, and their limitations.<sup>13</sup>

Alon's extant works convey a fiercely combative nationalism—a commitment which shaped both the surface and the deep structure of his work. Sometimes his nationalism worked to the advantage of his account. Most importantly, it predisposed him to prefer hard-headed political explanations for historical developments, and eschew theology and homiletics. For example, in some historiography written by Jews it is possible to detect a surprising strain of sentimentality about the Roman Empire.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, Alon regarded the Romans as essentially hostile to the Jews and their national/religious aims, and all too willing to act on their hostility. Admittedly, some of the details are imaginary (e.g. the notorious description of Yavneh as practically a prison camp—Alon 1957, 219–51). It could even be argued that in sharing the widespread belief in a golden age of Roman-Jewish relations under the Severan emperors Alon did not go far enough—unlike his friend Baer, who in an iconoclastic, brilliant, possibly wrong but wrongly neglected article first published in 1956 argued that before 313 CE the Romans scarcely distinguished Jews from Christians in legal terms: both were technically illicit, occasionally persecuted, usually tolerated by default (Baer 1956, 1961).<sup>15</sup> Certainly there was never any Severan golden age. In any case, Alon's view of the Romans as aggressively expansionist and strongly prone to violence may have seemed unusual or parochial even as late as the 1940s, but certainly resonates with the historiographical mainstream on Roman imperialism since the 1970s.

The other chief manifestations of Alon's nationalism are more troublesome; they pervade all his writings as fundamental presuppositions, have been unselfconsciously adopted by his followers, and have never been subjected to systematic criticism.<sup>16</sup> They can be distilled into three main components, intertwined and overlapping in Alon's writing, but roughly separable for heuristic purposes: (1) the Jews were always a (single) nation; (2) their nationhood had essentially a religious character (here one can speculate about the influence of Kaufmann); (3) as a result—that is, either because of their religious exclusivism or because of their profound devotion to their own nationhood, or some combination—they were unusually united internally, and unusually impervious to the cultural (p. 86) influence of their conquerors—and indeed manifested throughout antiquity a strong tendency to political opposition (this is one of Alon's additions to Dinur's analysis).

The first of these premisses was of course a cornerstone of Zionist historiography. The conviction that the Jews have always been a nation is not a priori inconsistent with a high level of analytic sophistication, and, as already noted, Alon did occasionally introduce a certain complexity into his writing—sometimes acknowledging in passing that there was

a variety of responses to Roman rule, that some Jews collaborated, even that many submitted to Roman authority whether or not they were conscious of acting as collaborators. Yet his Zionist commitment undoubtedly dominated his understanding of the past. Surely even the casual twenty-first-century reader of his work in Hebrew cannot fail to notice how often the word *ʾumma* (nation) is repeated, and how often the *ʾumma* is described as acting as a unit. The Jews are often (but not always) presented as unanimous in their cultural and political resistance to Rome, and in their support for rabbis and patriarchs and their obedience to their laws. Closely related to this is the tendency, which Alon shared with many of his contemporaries, to speak in terms of Jewish national and local institutions: the patriarchs and rabbis had quasiconstitutional authority (granted them at least initially by tradition and by the consensus of 'the nation', not by Rome), as did the Sanhedrin and the lower rabbinic courts and the institutions which comprised the local Jewish communities. To be sure, rabbinic literature itself often speaks of institutions, of the constitutional rights and authority enjoyed by rabbis and others. But as Alon knew very well, it most often does so in prescriptive texts, whereas rabbinic anecdotes and *ma'asiyot* (accounts of legal cases), which are at least ostensibly descriptive, often create a very different impression.<sup>17</sup> Alon's description of Palestinian Jewish life in institutional terms thus constituted a conscious choice, which requires some explanation.

A hint at one part of the explanation is provided by Baer's observation that Alon aspired to be the Jewish Mommsen—that is, that he wished to provide a firm constitutional-historical foundation for the history of the ancient Jewish polity, as Mommsen did for the Roman state. But Alon was not simply imitating Mommsen. His institutional history approach was above all a corollary of his nationalism. Institutions, after all, may be regarded as the form taken by customary asymmetrical social relations in the absence of resistance: in a society characterized by an unusually high level of internal unity, power would never need to be accumulated or exercised. Institutional prerogatives were all that was necessary to keep the society functioning in a stable way—in fact, they were the embodiment of social (p. 87) stability. This same factor also explains Alon's general failure to distinguish between prescriptive and descriptive texts: in so stable and united a society institutional prescription was likely to be translated directly into social action. Thus, the conception of Jewish history in institutional terms was closely associated with a nationalist (not necessarily only a Zionist) historiography.

As already suggested, Alon came to dominate the history of the Talmud period. Though he never produced a synthetic account of the subject,<sup>18</sup> and always remained in some sense an exegete of the Talmud, it is clear that he was—in self-conception, in the opinion of his students, and I would venture to say objectively—far more exclusively a historian than such peers as Lieberman and Urbach. Not unrelated to this is the fact that his work—though he and his students regarded it as purely 'scientific'—was shaped in matters large and small by an ardent commitment to Zionism, a scholarly preference which was not in fact shared by all his Hebrew University colleagues (Myers 1995: 7). His nationalism predisposed him to view talmudic history as essentially political, and to resist homiletics and, on the whole, religious idealization of the rabbis. One can imagine that his mastery

of rabbinics combined with his devotion to a materialist view of causation (tempered by a near mystical conviction of the special power of Jewish nationhood throughout history), the information that he struggled with the conflict between Torah study/traditional religious commitment and science, and furthermore, the fact that he had some sort of military (guerrilla?) career in addition to his university lectureship (Dzimitrowski 1950–1: 311), all made him an exceptionally appealing figure in Jerusalem in the 1930s and 1940s, especially to what we may call modernizing yeshiva students. By this I mean young men of intellectual inclinations from highly traditional backgrounds for whom modernizing, in the context of inter-war Poland or Palestine, involved attraction to secular education and/or revolutionary political movements.

Before discussing Alon's influence in the second half of the twentieth century, it will be instructive to pause briefly to contrast him with E. E. Urbach—a slightly younger contemporary who lived until 1991, taught for many decades in the Talmud Department of the Hebrew University, and wrote extensively and influentially on rabbinic history (though unlike Alon, Urbach also worked extensively on medieval and modern rabbinics, and on purely textual and theological issues). Also unlike Alon, Urbach never established a school, despite having been institutionally better situated to do so, if only by virtue of his longevity.

### (p. 88) **E. E. Urbach**<sup>19</sup>

As already suggested, Urbach's differences with Alon were not essentially methodological. He, too, concentrated on the history of halachah, which he thought was readily translatable into Jewish history *tout court*. He, too, assumed that the Jews were, at least in the Talmud period, unusually united, and adopted an institutional history approach. Nevertheless, he differed from Alon in important ways. Unlike Alon, he often started his essays with historical, rather than exegetical, questions, and indeed often seemed more *au courant* with contemporary historiographical trends than Alon. He thus wrote articles on the sorts of especially social historical issues which also engaged Roman historians and medievalists in the middle of the twentieth century—slavery, charity, class structure.<sup>20</sup> Though in retrospect these articles seem rather old-fashioned in their reluctance to introduce change, or even much chronological specificity at all, into their arguments, and did not completely avoid an apologetic and theological tone, they remain important, if only as collections of sources, accompanied by often still helpful explication. Alon had died before archaeological exploration reached its peak in Israel, so he never devoted much attention to archaeology, but Urbach occasionally made productive use of recent discoveries. His most enduringly important article on an ancient topic, in fact, defines to this day the mainstream of Israeli scholarship on a fundamental historical problem raised by archaeology: how could late antique Jews make such widespread use of figurative art, even in the decoration of synagogues, and even art iconographically little changed from its Roman pagan sources, as archaeology demonstrates they did (Urbach 1959)? Urbach, rejecting the view of Erwin R. Goodenough (see below), argued that the rabbis did not prohibit figurative art as unambiguously as has often been claimed—in



fact, when compared to Christian contemporaries like Tertullian, they were markedly lenient even about idols, out of pastoral concern for the Jews' economic welfare. And by the time pagan iconography was used in synagogues it had lost its religious meaning and so was purely decorative. The Jews' use of figurative art is thus fully consistent with their enduring and profound devotion to the rabbis and rabbinic law, *pace* Goodenough. This view, shared by the influential Israeli archaeologist and art historian Michael Avi-Yonah (see Avi-Yonah 1981), still prevails in Israel. Urbach's disagreement with Alon emerges most clearly in his review of the first volume of Alon's posthumous *History* (Urbach 1953). Much of the review is taken up with detailed arguments about the historical interpretation of individual rabbinic (p. 89) anecdotes and laws—a fact which demonstrates Urbach's methodological proximity to Alon. For example, where Alon plausibly detected factional division among the rabbis of the immediate post-Destruction period as they vied for dominance, Urbach saw them as united by the pastoral need to guide the Jews through crisis. Even this detail, though, hints at deeper differences between the two scholars. In brief, where Alon saw the rabbis as essentially political figures—with more or less realistic political concerns—continuous with the Jewish authorities of the Second Temple period, Urbach saw them in idealized Graetzian terms, as essentially religious figures, anticipatory of medieval rabbis. One may suggest the following formulation: while Alon idealized the Jewish nation, Urbach idealized the Jewish religion. Urbach, furthermore, advocated the *Wissenschaft* view that the 'Diaspora period' begins in 70, since the rabbis had at their disposal only the power afforded by moral suasion, as was the case throughout their subsequent history, though Urbach's Jewish masses were nearly as rabbinically oriented as Alon's. Indeed, Urbach seems to have been no less convinced a Zionist than Alon, but in his writing Urbach was less radical, endeavouring to reconcile Zionism with European liberal humanism, and with a Central European variety of liberal religious traditionalism.<sup>21</sup> It is thus above all in tone or mood that Urbach and Alon differed—with Urbach representing a *Wissenschaft*-oriented, theologically and apologetically inclined, in some sense 'soft', European/diasporic scholarship, while Alon embodied a tough, materialist, apparently intellectually rigorous, Zionist future. In the mid-twentieth century Urbach's work seemed all too continuous with a disastrously compromised diasporic Jewish past.

## Israeli Scholarship, 1950-1990

Much of the agenda of Israeli historiography of the Talmud period after 1950 remained that set by Alon, though enriched in ways I will presently describe. It may be said, though, that a fair amount of this scholarship has been decidedly epigonic in character, by which I mean that some of Alon's hypotheses achieved a sort of canonical status and in the process lost their original subtlety. So, for example, though Alon was mainly interested in rabbinic courts, he acknowledged (p. 90) that many Palestinian Jews had powerful reasons to bring their legal cases to Roman courts, city councils, and the like. Alon's followers seem to have absorbed his account's rabbinocentrism, but not the qualifications, and so produced ever-more rigidly rabbinocentric accounts. Certainly, the fundamental assumptions of Alon's work—concerning the nationhood of the post-

Destruction Jews, and their cultural resistance to Roman rule—were never challenged, and underwent the same process of rigidification.

Furthermore, the field absorbed only with difficulty the implications of the masses of new material—mainly archaeological—that came to light in the generation after Alon's death. For example, Alon paid little attention to the Later Roman Empire and so in effect left a 300-year long piece of the Talmud period available for his successors to work on, a stroke of luck since many or even most of the new archaeological discoveries in Israel were of Late Antique material (fourth through seventh Centuries). But an examination of the most noteworthy Israeli publication concerning the period (Baras 1982-4),<sup>22</sup> one that can be fairly regarded as a collective work of the Jerusalem mainstream—in fact the only attempt at a synthesis aside from Avi-Yonah's textbook (originally published in 1946 as *Biyemei Roma U-Vyzantion*, and frequently reprinted)—reveals an interesting pattern. The authors for almost everything down to the fourth century are members of the Alon school (except for Lee Levine, whose work combines Israeli and diasporic features), whereas the post-Constantinian chapters are by classicists, and others. There was thus some give in the system, primarily because archaeology was regarded as a separate field from history, and because the literary sources available for the fifth and sixth centuries (given the difficulty of subjecting midrashim and the early *piyyut* to the sort of historicist reading the Alon school felt confident about using on the Tosefta and the Palestinian Talmud)<sup>23</sup> tended to be written in Greek or Latin and so were best left to classicists, patristics scholars, and experts in Roman law. However, the fundamental assumptions even of this larger and looser group of scholars about 'inner' Jewish history, as a history of the continuity of Jewish nationhood and rabbinic authority, remained those of Alon. This is true also of Avi Yonah's influential work.

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Even within the rabbinic-historical mainstream, a tendency developed to explore new topics. Alon himself, for instance, had contributed a few entries to Samuel Klein's *Sefer Hayishuv*, but historical geography, following Klein's model and extending it by focusing also on problems of administrative history (following Avi-Yonah 1962; Abel 1933-8; Alt 1959; and others), now became a major concern. More interesting, in my opinion, was the Alon school's gradual production of a full-blown economic and social history—topics Alon himself had hardly discussed. Though I do not believe that the producers of this work all consciously set out to fill in the gaps left by Alon in order to produce a comprehensive, coherent, from-the-ground-up account of Jewish life in post-Destruction Palestine, this is in effect precisely what they did. But they did so in a way which accentuates the most problematic elements of Alon's method, and bespeaks their growing intellectual involution and deep isolation from the historical mainstream. In particular, the Israeli economic and social history constitutes a strong expression of Jewish exceptionalism, as I will presently explain. To be sure, this has been a feature of much Jewish historiography—in fact, of national histories in general (Endelman 1997: 10-3). But here it assumed a remarkable, and remarkably explicit, form.

## Feliks, Sperber, Z. Safrai

The senior figure in this project was Yehudah Feliks (b. 1922), trained academically in Talmud and botany and for many years lecturer in and professor of Talmud and 'Land of Israel Studies' at Bar Ilan and Tel Aviv Universities. The bulk of Feliks's work has been exegetical and lexicographical, and has contributed importantly to the understanding of rabbinic agricultural law. But Feliks's dissertation, twice published with revisions and expansions and often summarized in articles and encyclopaedia entries, concerned Jewish agriculture in the Talmud period (Feliks 1990).<sup>24</sup>

Here is part of the introduction to one of these summaries, which gives a good idea of much of this work:<sup>25</sup>

... In our days, the question naturally arises: How could this small land, mostly stones and wilderness, sustain a population which at some periods reached 2-3 million, the vast majority of which subsisted on agriculture? Among the answers that have been given is (p. 92) that climatic changes which have occurred, in the direction of dryness and reduced precipitation, allow the supposition that land available for agricultural exploitation was once more extensive... [But this is not the case.] Nevertheless, it is clear that serious changes have occurred in the agricultural landscape of the country. The stony modern landscape characteristic of extensive areas in the mountainous regions of the Mediterranean climatic zone differs from that of the biblical period, and certainly from that of the Mishnah and Talmud periods. In the past, these areas were farmed intensively by means of terraces, but with the abandonment of the land by the Hebrew [*sic*] farmers at the end of the fourth century, the terraces were gradually destroyed; the soil then eroded and stones surfaced.

In general it may be said that the Land of Israel sustained its many inhabitants through the diligence of farmers who enjoyed a rather high cultural level thanks to their intensive work on the land, and to their powerful ties to the land—their ancestral heritage. As to the Hebrew farmer, he did not stagnate, and his heart was open to new agricultural technologies. These factors helped the Hebrew farmer achieve exceedingly high yields, achieved again in this country only in our own times. (Baras *et al.* 1982-4: i. 419-41)

In sum, Jewish farmers, as a result of their 'ancestral heritage' and 'high cultural level', were unusually devoted to their land (this echoes the importance of land tenure for Dinur and Alon), which they farmed intensively and in technically innovative ways—so that the land produced exceptionally high yields and could support a surprisingly large population. Elsewhere Feliks argued from rabbinic texts that wheat yields ranged from 22.5:1 in bad years to 45:1 or more in good years, yields in fact not equalled until modern, disease-resistant strains of wheat and chemical fertilizers were introduced in Palestine-Israel in the 1940s and 1950s (Broshi 1986: 50-1). Feliks was clearly anxious about this suggestion. Furthermore, he struggled to explain away a perfectly good, ostensibly Palestinian, talmudic legal tradition which seemed to state that wheat yields ranged between 3.75:1 and 7.5:1 (which is in line with estimates for dry-farming

yields common among Roman economic historians), since other rabbinic, plus a few biblical and New Testament, texts seemed to imply much higher yields. Despite his own sense of the plausible, Feliks clearly had a strong a priori interest in adopting the high figures given in idealizing biblical and aggadic texts, and dimly implied in the halachic texts he analysed. Feliks did not pursue the immense social, economic, political, and cultural implications of such high grain yields, except to note their gross demographic impact, and to infer from them the precocious sophistication and Zionist interests of the ancient Jewish farmers. The rest of his work consisted of discussion of plants and agricultural practices mentioned in the Mishnah and Talmud. Feliks believed, in my view incorrectly, that the results of this investigation simply constituted a description of ancient Jewish agriculture, which he believed was different from ancient 'gentile' agriculture. What he actually demonstrated was that the farming practices described in the Mishnah were fairly typical of dry farming in the Roman eastern Mediterranean. It remained for his successors to work out the implications of Feliks's work.

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Daniel Sperber's first two books, which are our main concern here, emerged from a rather different academic tradition (Sperber 1974—acknowledging the inspiration and help of Michael Crawford and Richard Duncan-Jones; Sperber 1978). Both were based on his dissertation at University College, London, and demonstrate his immersion in the work of Roman social and economic historians of 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Furthermore, Sperber seems to have regarded himself as a follower of Lieberman much more than Alon. Like his model, he was especially interested in using classical sources and Roman history to interpret difficult rabbinic texts. As a writer, he was rhetorically much 'cooler' than the followers of Alon; there is no Zionist preaching, and no description of the rabbinic past in Utopian terms. What he shared with his Israeli colleagues (his books were published after his immigration to Israel in 1968 and his hiring as a lecturer in Talmud at Bar Ilan) was a tendency to highly positivistic, though not wholly uncritical, reading of rabbinic, especially halachic, sources (at a time when such an approach could no longer be taken for granted). Furthermore, the thesis of his books was unmistakably inspired by Alon. In brief, Sperber wished to argue that the decline of the Jewish population in Palestine—their abandonment of agriculture, growing economic hardship, and eventual departure—was mainly the consequence of the 'crisis of the third century',<sup>26</sup> and the sporadic bouts of inflation which affected the Roman economy through the middle of the fourth. Sperber thereby accepted the hypothesis of a steep decline beginning c.300, but implicitly and interestingly diminished Christianity's role in this decline.

Sperber's books are different from his earlier work in one important respect. In the earlier work he summarily rejected Feliks's crop yields as 'completely impossible' and 'patently absurd' (Sperber 1970:11, n. 3).<sup>27</sup> In the books, however, he accepted Feliks's yields but oddly failed to integrate their implications into a description of the Palestinian agrarian economy which was otherwise as primitivizing as K. D. White's, Ramsay MacMullen's, Richard Duncan-Jones's, and Peter Garnsey's view of the Roman Imperial

economy in general. Thus, the final chapter of *The Land* contains a realistic account of how the small size of the average farm plot in the Palestinian interior inhibited the introduction of innovative technologies common elsewhere in the Roman world, excluded the possibility of agricultural self-sufficiency, and interfered with the development of farmers' emotional bonds to their land. In sum, Sperber's view of Palestinian Jewish agrarian life was precisely the opposite of Feliks's, leaving the high yields of the first, second, and early third Centuries unexplained.

If Sperber's work remained poised incoherently between 'Loxbridge' and Jerusalem, between Finleyite primitivism and Zionist utopianism, his younger colleague Ze'ev Safrai eventually produced an integrated and coherent social and economic (p. 94) history of Jewish Palestine in the Talmud period. To be sure, to reach this conclusion one must ignore a number of problems in his work. Somehow, it seems easier to excuse the common Israeli scholarly practice of writing of Palestine/Eretz Israel but referring only to that country's Jewish inhabitants in a book written in 1950 or 1960 than in one published in 1994.<sup>28</sup> The same is true of the ardent and increasingly embattled rabbinocentrism of the account. Add to this the pervasive inaccuracy of citation, the common failure to comprehend the economic-historical models utilized or rejected, the elementarily unsound maximalist interpretation of rabbinic texts (so that, for example, every Galilean village is said to have had all the commercial and religious institutions scattered rabbinic sources ascribe to individual villages), and one begins to sense that one is witnessing a historiographical style in its terminal decadence. And yet, for all its flaws, Safrai's work cannot be ignored.

Safrai began by accepting the grain yields proposed by Feliks (1994:108-10)—and was one of the first to grasp and explore their implications. For Safrai, these yields fuelled a modern-sounding economic system: Palestinian agriculture in the Roman and Byzantine periods was characterized not by the widespread cultivation of the wheat and barley needed for subsistence, as it had been in the Second Temple period, but rather by a tendency to regional specialization. Thus, Galilee produced olives, Judaea grapes, the Jordan Valley dates and balsam, and so on. Such a system necessitated a strong orientation toward trade, both within the province and between Palestine and its neighbours, which was thus an extremely important factor in the Palestinian economy. Dependence on trade rather than subsistence agriculture also allowed for a population growth far more massive than could be predicted on the basis of the carrying capacity of the land (as Feliks had already suggested). Hence Safrai hypothesized high population density, which meant for the Jews primarily settlement in a large number of big villages, called *'arim* in rabbinic literature, with populations ranging from 100 to 1,000 families.<sup>29</sup> These villages were not only home to farmers but also, because of their advanced, trade-fuelled economics, sustained a wide range of specialized artisans; so the Jewish villages were not economically dependent on (and not influenced culturally by) the neighbouring pagan, Christian, or mixed cities (Safrai 1994: 21-49). Each had authorized political institutions (the *tovei ha'ir*, *parnasim*, *hazanim*, etc.), partly controlled by the patriarchs and/or Sanhedrin and partly by an assembly of the village citizenry, which operated in accordance with halachah and local custom (pp. 46-8). Every village had a school

attended by all the local boys, staffed by both primary (Bible) (p. 95) and secondary (Mishnah) teachers (*soferim* and *meshanim*—even though in rabbinic sources these are invariably regarded as two functions served by a single individual). Every village also had a system of charity distribution (p. 50), a local militia to guard against brigands (p. 52), needless to say a synagogue, which housed the schools and had rooms for visitors (pp. 53–4), a public bath-house, and a rudimentary court system (p. 54); they also contained committees which supervised markets and other aspects of trade in accordance with Jewish law (pp. 55–60). In Safrai's account, then, all the elements of Alon's vision of Jewish life in the Talmud period, its national-religious Utopian features greatly exaggerated, are incorporated into a coherent socio-economic history.

Safrai's predecessors tended to acknowledge their ideological commitments, while insisting on their complete scientific objectivity, but Safrai generally avoided the nationalistic rhetoric of his predecessors. He even rejected Feliks's Jewish exceptionalism, acknowledging that Palestine was poorer and less developed than parts of Roman North Africa or Italy—a position which would logically require Safrai to posit wheat yields higher than 35:1 for most of the Roman Empire and so to reject completely the work of all ancient economic and social historians of the twentieth century (hinted at on pp. 109, 10, and 436–7)!

Given the low and declining level of interest in the history of the Talmud period outside Israel, reflected in the failure even of *The Economy of Roman Palestine*, published only in English, to attract much serious attention, the main challenges to the views of Feliks *et al.* have come from Israeli archaeologists, especially Magen Broshi and Israel Finkelstein.<sup>30</sup> Both used hypotheses standard among classical and Near Eastern archaeologists to calculate the carrying capacity of the land, population density in settled areas and the population size of parts (Finkelstein) or all (Broshi) of the country. Both started from the assumption that in most premodern periods the economy of Palestine was dominated by subsistence agriculture, and that wheat yields were normally a conventional 5:1 or so. But neither has explored the implications of these for the broader history of the Jews in ancient Palestine.

## Non-Israeli Scholarship

History has been far less a concern for scholars of the Talmud period outside Israel; likewise, their interests, motivations, and ideological commitments have generally—certainly in the second half of the twentieth century—been far more diffuse. (p. 96) Most scholars who have written about the post-Destruction period have been Jewish, but Certainly not all of them. Two of the most influential were, respectively, a Presbyterian minister (George Foot Moore) and a lapsed fundamentalist Methodist (Erwin Ramsdell Goodenough) (see Smith 1971; 1967: 63; Sandmel 1968). Nevertheless, I think it would be safe to generalize that until very recently most scholars in the field were, as social and cultural types, not terribly different from their Israeli colleagues. (One thing that changed in the 1980s and 1990s was the revival of German, now mainly non-Jewish, rabbinic and

related scholarship.) Certainly this is true of the first generation of American scholars, who were drawn from the same yeshivot and Central European seminaries and universities as the Israelis. Saul Lieberman and Gedalyah Alon were roughly contemporaries at Slobodka and as graduate students in Jerusalem, and though Lieberman's American followers received his work in ways that marked them off sharply from Alon's Israeli followers, Lieberman's personal and academic interests were always primarily Israel-oriented. He regarded the Jerusalem scholars as his main colleagues, had close connections in the Israeli government and especially in the Mizrahi/National Religious Party, and played a role in the foundation of Bar-Ilan University.<sup>31</sup>

But many of the scholars of the next generation, too, resembled the 'modernizing yeshivah students' who dominated the field throughout the twentieth century in Palestine/Israel—in that all were struggling (perhaps explicitly in life, and implicitly, even unconsciously, in their scholarship) to balance the conflicting claims of a normative religious tradition and a set of modern, individualistic, political/cultural affiliations. But the differences are striking. Little American, British, or German scholarship is at all Zionist in orientation, which is not unsurprising given the institutional importance of Zionism in American and British Jewish life, and its alleged ideological Centrality, at least for a time, among American and British Jews. One reason for this is that the most Zionistically inclined immigrated to Israel, and in fact in the 1970s and following decades many practitioners of Jewish studies in Israel were American and British immigrants, one of whom has been discussed above. But for those who remained, it is religious liberalism which seems the main influence, especially on Americans, though again its influence is far more diffuse and implicit in American scholarship than Zionism in Israeli scholarship, mainly because religious liberalism almost by definition requires a less intense and totalizing commitment than political radicalism.

### **(p. 97) Lieberman and Goodenough**

Lieberman's main work, on Palestinian rabbinic texts, has been discussed elsewhere in this volume, and his collections and scattered articles most relevant to my topic have been mentioned above. But they, and especially their reception, deserve separate notice here.<sup>32</sup> In brief, as has already been suggested, Lieberman was mainly concerned in this work to explain difficult passages, especially in the Palestinian Talmud and midrashim, by drawing on his considerable knowledge of classical and patristic literature, Greek papyrology and epigraphy, Roman history, and so on. Much of this exegetical work amounted to little more than brief lexicographical or text-critical notes, but on several occasions generated substantial, and still valuable, historical essays.<sup>33</sup> Still other pieces, published as *Greek in Jewish Palestine* and *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine*, cohered by apparently demonstrating the broad if not always deep influence of Graeco-Roman culture on the rabbis and their Palestinian Jewish contemporaries.<sup>34</sup> Some readers saw past the episodic character of Lieberman's work and read it as an innovative, if very partial and impressionistic, account of Roman provincial life from within; *Greek in Jewish Palestine* inspired Hans Yohanan Lewy (1904–45), a German-born classicist who taught at

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the Hebrew University from 1933, to imagine Lieberman as, potentially, the Rostovtzeff of the Jews—who would exploit the vast and presumably reliable rabbinic literature to produce a full social and cultural history of the Jews under Roman rule.<sup>35</sup> Many readers sensed that Lieberman was arguing, again indirectly and episodically, about rabbinic and general Jewish integration in a world dominated by Greek culture.

(p. 98)

Lieberman proved influential in several different circles. His influence was unquestionably strongest among academic talmudists and rabbinites, who are not my concern here. Connected to these, but also in opposition to them to some extent, are a small group of postmodernist, or postmodernistically inclined scholars, in existence only since about 1990, orbiting around Daniel Boyarin—a zealous though paradoxical follower of Lieberman. These scholars will be briefly discussed below. Lieberman's influence among other scholars of ancient Judaism was more subtle and needs to be considered together with other factors. In brief, he contributed, not necessarily intentionally, to the coalescence of a liberal scholarship on the ancient Jews. In this account, the Jews did not react to the Destruction with political resistance and cultural self-enclosure, but eventually with creative engagement with the majority culture—which in this account was often abstracted from its association with the violent imperialism of an expansionist state—in a way which enriched the Jews' group identity. This view was consistent with and informed by a specifically American historiography (articulated by Salo Baron, who shared students with Lieberman) which called attention to the beneficial aspects of the experience of the Jews under foreign domination. The other main architect of the liberal mainstream of non-Israeli ancient Judaic scholarship was Erwin R. Goodenough.

Goodenough (1893-1965) was a New Testament scholar by training, and for the first part of his career as Professor of History at Yale University, an authority on the works of Philo of Alexandria. He had few students and none at all who are directly relevant to this account, but he had a tremendous influence on the field, in part because of the sheer mass and notoriety of his most important work, *Jewish Symbols in the Greco-Roman Period* (1953-67), but mainly because part of his argument in this work, mediated through Morton Smith, became one of the foundations of the work of Jacob Neusner.

In brief, Goodenough began by collecting all identifiably Jewish iconographic remains (and some material regarded only by Goodenough as Jewish) discovered by archaeologists. His method of interpreting this material involved distinguishing two levels of meaning. The more basic Good-enough called the art's 'value', that is, its religious/emotive content, which he regarded as universal, and so recoverable by introspection, among other things. The more superficial level of the symbols' meaning Good-enough called its 'interpretation'—that is, the stories the makers and viewers of the art told about it, which were culturally specific and can be reconstructed provided we know which body of literature to use to do so. (So, for example, the depiction of Greek gods on the mosaic pavements of ancient synagogues does not mean that the Jews attached religious importance to those gods—this latter is part of the art's 'interpretation', undoubtedly



altered by the Jews in the act of borrowing; rather, the Jews used the images for their not specifically Greek or pagan Values'.) Good-enough argued that, by its very existence, the art, which included many figurative elements, often borrowed quite directly from Graeco-Roman (p. 99) pagan sources, demonstrated that most Jews, both in Palestine and in the diaspora, rejected rabbinic authority—since the rabbis opposed such art as a violation of the Second Commandment. More basically, there is nothing in rabbinic literature to prepare us for the type of religiosity implied by the art. For in Good-enough's view, none of it, not even rosettes and geometric designs, was merely decorative. It was all profoundly meaningful as a component of a mystical, deeply Hellenized, type of Jewish religiosity which received its most articulate formulation in the works of Philo of Alexandria.

Elements of Goodenough's argument were almost universally criticized. Few scholars accepted his Jungian approach to the interpretation of the ancient Jewish art, in all its cheerful subjectivity. It certainly seemed counter-intuitive to ascribe religious significance to geometric designs, and few were convinced of the utility of Philo's treatises in making sense of any of the art. It was also powerfully argued, primarily by Urbach, as noted above, that rabbinic attitudes toward figurative art were far more complex and ambivalent than Goodenough, who had little knowledge of rabbinics, thought. Nevertheless, some scholars were convinced that the material collected by Goodenough demonstrated the diffusion of a not easily reconstructed type of Jewish religiosity very different from that advocated by the rabbis—even if the makers and viewers of the art were not necessarily hostile to rabbinic Judaism, as opposed to ignorant of or apathetic toward it. Such scholars, of whom Morton Smith was the most eloquent, were convinced that for all its flaws Goodenough's work was revolutionary, and would require a complete revision of ancient Judaic scholarship (Smith 1967).<sup>36</sup>

As scholars, Goodenough and Lieberman were utterly different. Lieberman regarded the rabbis as essentially the leadership of the Jews after the Destruction, religiously conservative in most respects but at the same time culturally 'Hellenized'. Goodenough regarded mainstream Judaism as profoundly Hellenized, to the point of being essentially a peculiar type of Graeco-Roman mystery religion; his rabbis rejected Hellenism and so were historically marginal until some time near the end of antiquity. But elements of these views could be yoked together to produce a single image of an ancient Judaism thoroughly and creatively engaged with the 'Hellenistic' culture of the Roman East, yet maintaining some sense of distinctiveness.<sup>37</sup>

### (p. 100) **Smith and Neusner**

The first scholar to try to reconcile the visions of Lieberman and Goodenough was probably Jacob Neusner, in a very early essay on Goodenough's *Jewish Symbols* (Neusner 1963). In fact, Neusner was probably the most enthusiastic serious reviewer of Goodenough, and though he continued to subscribe to Lieberman's views about the

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Hellenism of the rabbis, this notion eventually became much less central to his system than Goodenough's hypothesis of rabbinic marginality.

The other main influence on Neusner was Morton Smith (1915-91). Like Goodenough, Smith was originally a New Testament scholar from a Protestant background who lapsed into atheism. The only systematic work Smith ever wrote on rabbinic literature was his Ph.D. dissertation (Hebrew University, 1945)<sup>38</sup> published in English in 1951, which devoted a chapter (pp. 142-51) to the argument that the several documents of rabbinic literature posed a 'synoptic problem' (that is, they feature slightly different versions of the same basic material) very similar to that posed by the Gospels. It should thus be possible to apply to rabbinic literature some of the same sort of analysis scholars had long used on the New Testament, Smith implied. This thesis was highly eccentric in the context of the Talmud scholarship of the mid-twentieth century, and it is surely no accident that Smith wrote his dissertation in the classics department under the unlikely supervision of Moshe (Max) Schwabe, an authority on Late Imperial Greek literature. Though Smith subsequently became close to Lieberman, as far as I am aware he had little or no contact with Jerusalem rabbinites or Jewish historians.

What was novel about Smith's suggestion was the supposition that rabbinic texts could be approached as texts, literary artefacts, shaped by the interests, including the self-interest, of their authors/compilers, and so having like all artefacts a real but complex relation to the social realities which shaped them, as opposed to unedited or barely edited repositories of authoritative 'traditions' with little or no reality as texts but of undoubted historicity. Though Smith later wrote several articles on rabbinic and other post-Destruction Jewish topics, the main focus of his work was the Hebrew Bible and associated history, the New Testament, and ancient magic. I suspect that he was reluctant to explore rabbinics further because he feared he would never have the requisite expertise. In any case, Smith's programme was eventually, and gradually, taken up by Neusner.

As a rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, Neusner had studied with Lieberman, and he subsequently completed a Ph.D. at Columbia under the supervision of Baron and Smith. His dissertation, *A Life of Yohanan Ben Zakkai* (p. 101) (1962), begins with an explanation of why he eschewed the sceptical, Bultmannesque, project (surely urged on him by Smith) of analysing the rabbinic traditions about Yohanan not only to retrieve their historical core but also to reconstruct the concerns of their tradents and the biases of the rabbinic documents' editors, and produced instead what was in most respects a conventional Wissenschaft-style rabbinic biography. Over the next decade Neusner continued to write rabbinic history in the positivist style, resulting in the massive *History of the Jews in Babylonia* (1965-70), but by 1970 had completely revised his work on Rabban Yohanan ben Zakkai in line with Smith's ideas, and quickly followed this with the much longer *Rabbinic Traditions About the Pharisees Before 70* (1971), and *Eliezer ben Hyrcanus* (1973) which utilized the same method. In the introduction to the first of these books, (1970: p. xi), Neusner wrote:

Here my task is critically to study and analyse th[e] sources [on Yohanan], to try to locate the origins of different parts of them, to see how the whole structure grew. My purpose is thus not to produce a connected history of the man and his time, but to offer systematic observations on the tradition about him and through it, on the development of a sample body of talmudic literature... In my *Life*, I described the content, and now turn to the formation, of the tradition.

I do not suppose we can come to a final and positive assessment of the historicity of various stories and sayings. We surely cannot declare a narrative to be historically reliable simply because it contains no improbabilities... We must not confuse verisimilitude with authenticity.

The result was revolutionary. In fact, the few reviewers of Neusner's book, though mainly sympathetic, had little sense of its importance.<sup>39</sup> The immediate effect of Neusner's work was to introduce methodological self-consciousness into a field previously marked by its relative rarity; to generate a high level of scepticism about the task of extracting historical information from rabbinic laws and anecdotes; and to shift attention from the content of the traditions to the historical factors affecting their transmission. For those who accepted Neusner's work, it was now impossible to write rabbinic biographies, and the hypothesis of the rabbis' political, social, and cultural marginality now became widespread, if with a certain ambivalence and confusion, detectable even in Neusner's own work. It was now possible to speak of a distinctive 'rabbinic' Judaism (though the term had long been current, especially in German scholarship), just one element in a landscape populated by diverse (p. 102) 'Judaisms'. Neusner thus produced an account which appealed to a post-war American and European environment in which hierarchy and orthodoxy were questioned, variety, change, and creativity (an important corollary of Neusner's view in the 1980s and 1990s that each successive rabbinic document was utterly different from its predecessors) Celebrated. On the other hand, Neusner's work cast doubt on the entire oeuvre of the Zionist and Israeli historians, which had always assumed the historicity of rabbinic documents and their utility in reconstructing the history of the Jews in general, not just that of a marginal Jewish subculture, and was largely ignored by them. But it proved incapable of providing a historical account to replace the one now discredited, and in general seems to have contributed to the decline of 'talmudic history' outside Israel, and to the rise of a 'history of religions' approach.<sup>40</sup>

Neusner's extensive early work is absolutely dwarfed by his voluminous writing of the 1980s and 1990s, by the end of which he had published over 800 books and many hundreds of articles (over 300 are listed in RAMBI, the Hebrew University's bibliography of articles in Jewish studies, but I suspect this list is far from complete and in any case excludes reviews). In this period Neusner emerged as an exceptionally problematic figure in the field, whose increasingly rare flashes of brilliance were lost in a firestorm of vituperation, repetition, and general unreadability.<sup>41</sup> But his work of the 1970s was influential far outside his circle of students,<sup>42</sup> and though there are signs of a gathering reaction, the main conclusions of his early work—especially concerning the textuality of the rabbinic texts, the need for methodological self-consciousness, the futility of writing

rabbinic biography or of any straightforwardly positivist reading of rabbinic texts—have become part of the non-Israeli scholarly *koine*, and are in little immediate danger of being displaced.

### (p. 103) **Archaeology**

For practical reasons, archaeology was never as important in American or European Jewish studies as it is in Israel, yet there were some important developments in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. In America, Eric Meyers and his associates and students provided important material foundations for the increasingly normative liberal historiography on the ancient Jews. In his technical archaeological work, Meyers insistently rejected an old-fashioned version of classical and Near Eastern (or 'biblical') archaeology of which the main goal was allegedly to discover either grand structures, or material which could be connected to canonical literary texts, preferably by confirming their truth. Instead, Meyers claimed to embrace a context-oriented archaeology which was mainly concerned to contribute to the reconstruction of ancient societies, especially those members of them unattested in the literary sources—for example, poor villagers. In his synthetic writing, though, Meyers used archaeology to argue for Jewish acculturation in Late Antique Palestine, and, less convincingly, for the peaceful coexistence of Jews and their neighbours (which is in fact unproveable from archaeological remains). For him, Late Antique Palestine was a liberal Jewish Utopia, just as it was a national religious Utopia for Ze'ev Safrai.

Much more importantly, Meyers was also among those advocating the new chronology of the Palestinian synagogues, first suggested by the Franciscan excavators of Kefar Nahum (Capernaum). In brief, in the 1960s archaeologists lifted the floor of the supposedly second-century synagogue of Kefar Nahum and found thousands of low-denomination coins of the fourth and early fifth centuries. This led them to challenge the traditional dating of 'Galilean style' synagogues (characterized by decorated façades, simple interiors, gabled, three-part entryways, and so on) to the second and third centuries, which in turn has provoked a re-examination of the stratigraphy of other 'early' synagogues, and led to the conclusion that they were actually built in the fourth century or even much later, and to a growing scepticism about the utility of architectural style in dating ancient synagogues. The implications of this redating are actually revolutionary, but are just now starting to be considered (Schwartz 2001a).<sup>43</sup>

### (p. 104) **Schäfer, Cohen, Goodman**

Peter Schäfer, of Berlin and Princeton, Shaye Cohen, now of Harvard, and Martin Goodman, of Oxford, who all began their careers in the 1970s, exemplify the impact of Neusner's early work far outside the circle of his students, in widely scattered academic precincts. None can strictly be called a follower of Neusner, but all learned from him lessons about the importance of tradition-history in the evaluation of rabbinic texts,

scepticism about the texts' historicity, and, at the very least, agnosticism about the social and political position of the rabbis in post-Destruction Palestine. All have also striven, to a greater or lesser extent, to free themselves from the sort of internalist Jewish history practised by their Israeli colleagues, in an effort to understand Jewish history as a component of the history of the Roman Empire—an inheritance less from Neusner than from Lieberman and Smith, and in Goodman's case probably from Arnaldo Momigliano and Fergus Millar.

Schäfer, in his historically oriented work (his textual work will not be considered here), is the most methodologically rigorous and consistent of the three. In brief, in his longer works, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, he tended to proceed by beginning with a historical question, then gathering and setting out, in chronological order and divided by corpus, the relevant texts and other material. This technique permitted detailed and compelling analysis of how Certain sorts of historical traditions grew, with no connection to the events they purported to describe: a good example is his study of the rabbinic tradition of a religious persecution associated with the Bar Kokhba Revolt (Schäfer 1990). This study showed that the tradition, barely present in the Mishnah, grew more detailed and important as it passed chronologically through the rabbinic corpora. In general, Schäfer's sceptical positivism (as we may call it) proved a much more effective tool for dislodging accreted speculative reconstruction than for constructing new accounts. In the case of the Bar Kokhba Revolt, Schäfer's proposed explanation—it was connected to an internal struggle between Jewish 'Hellenizers' or collaborationists, and separatists—in my view has much more merit than has generally been allowed, but has convinced few (Schäfer 1981). Here again, I think he was hindered by his theoretical constraints, which made it practically impossible to make a strong positive case of any sort. As Schäfer's interests broadened in the 1980s and 1990s, to take in hekhalot texts, magic, and the seemingly inexhaustible question of the extent of the rabbis' integration in the cultural world of the Roman East—he was less completely dominated by his sceptical positivism, but one still has a sense in his work of excessive restraint—to be sure, an admirable characteristic in a self-indulgent world, but one which seems to inhibit him from complete execution of the historian's task.

(p. 105)

Shaye Cohen, like Neusner, studied with Lieberman at the Jewish Theological Seminary, where he subsequently taught, and completed his Ph.D. at Columbia under the direction of Smith (in 1975), and in 1991 succeeded Neusner at Brown. Cohen produced a substantial corpus of work, especially in the 1980s, about Jewish identity in antiquity and the related topics of conversion, mixed marriage, circumcision, and personal status. Here he has been especially concerned to discover the earliest attestations of practices, discoveries enabled by rigorously precise collection and analysis of literary material, and is not unwilling to speculate about why Certain practices (e.g. conversion rituals) changed, or why words changed meaning or mentalities shifted, at Certain times (Cohen 1999). Cohen, like Schäfer, is thus a sceptical positivist, who works on the assumption that history can be reconstructed provided the sources are analysed carefully enough.

Cohen's argument that Judaism changed from ethnicity to religion has dominated discussion of the subject (though in a recent revision of this argument, Cohen has softened the problematic binary opposition somewhat), even among people who disagree with his dating of the shift to the Hasmonean period. His account of Yavneh and the coalescence of rabbinic Judaism after 70, as not the rise of an orthodoxy, but precisely the rejection of sectarianism and the embrace of pluralism, has become the standard view outside Israel, notwithstanding its sentimentality and its all-too-obvious appeal to Jewish religious liberalism (Cohen 1984). Nevertheless I would argue that, like Schäfer and for the same reasons, Cohen is much better at dismantling arguments than at constructing them. For both, history boils down to appropriately sceptical methods of reading; the use of models adapted from social theory, sociology, and social anthropology, which has the potential to resolve the tensions implicit in sceptical positivism, is quite self-consciously excluded.<sup>44</sup>

Goodman is something of an outlier in this group. His primary training at Oxford was in classics and Roman history, not rabbinics, and he is unquestionably a historian rather than a textual scholar—one of the few in this field outside Israel. Furthermore, underlying much of his work is the theoretical question of the exemplarity of the Jews as a subject people of the Roman East—a question, some might argue, properly of Roman rather than Jewish history. Nevertheless, Goodman's first book, written in dissertation form fewer than ten years after the publication of *Development of a Legend*, constitutes what was probably the first, and is also in my view still one of the most successful attempts yet to use a Neusnerian approach to rabbinic texts to construct a positive, if necessarily hypothetical, (p. 106) account of an important period of post-Destruction Jewish history (Goodman 1983: esp. 3–16). Goodman was not precisely unique in the range of his knowledge, whether viewed as a Jewish or as a Roman historian, but he was and has remained unusually up to date in both fields and unusually engaged in their internal issues and debates. I would suggest also that his methodological eclecticism and his willingness to consider all remains as evidence, his recognition that he is writing about a society that is likely to have been recognizably human, have allowed him to circumvent the methodological impasse discussed above.

Britain is unquestionably outside the mainstream of rabbinic-oriented scholarship, and it seems to me unlikely that it has the potential to turn into a subsidiary Centre, as Germany has with the help of Schäfer. Goodman's work has thus been received as if it were to some extent peripheral to the concerns of the American and Israeli Centres, though it has served the important purpose of introducing classicists and Roman historians to Jewish history and rabbinics. Nevertheless, Goodman's work in fact addresses concerns of the mainstream, and for the most part does so more compellingly and with more sophistication than most Israeli and American scholars seem willing to appreciate.

### The 1990s and Beyond

I would suggest that a generational shift is beginning to coalesce. In America and Europe this shift takes the form of a reaction against Goodenough- and Lieberman-influenced integrationism and Neusnerian scepticism and phenomenology, and in Israel, of a reaction against reflexively Zionist naive historicism. A feature of this shift is a growing interest, influenced by developments in classics and ancient history, in seeing the Jewish experience in Christian late antiquity (c.300–650) as meaningfully different from that in the pagan Roman Empire. However, I have the impression (which could be falsified statistically, though with difficulty) that the numerical balance in Jewish studies in general is shifting away from the study of antiquity and the middle ages and toward modernity, for reasons which may have little to do with the inner intellectual dynamics of the field.

To be sure, the fact that this change is just beginning to take shape implies that the 1990s, and following, were characterized by significant continuity with the previous decades. As of the time of this writing (2001), Israeli figures like Shmuel Safrai are still publishing, while slightly younger scholars like Aharon Oppenheimer, Lee Levine, Daniel Sperber, Isaiah Gafni (e.g. Gafni 1990), Ze'ev Safrai, and Joshua Schwartz (e.g. Schwartz 1986), who all started publishing between the late 1960s and (p. 107) c.1980, are still in their prime, as are Peter Schäfer, Shaye Cohen, Martin Goodman, David Goodblatt, and Eric Meyers outside Israel. And several younger scholars continue to work along the same lines. Efrat Habas-Rubin and, to some extent, Steven Fine, for example, continue to write maximalist and positivistic rabbinic history in the classic Israeli style (e.g. Fine 1998), while several younger students of Neusner and of Schafer still embrace sceptical positivism—for example, Martin Jacobs's important, *ech*-Schäferian book on the patriarchate (Jacobs 1995). In the same sorts of circles, the by-now traditional cultural-historical hypotheses—in Israel, of the Jews' cultural self-enclosure, and outside Israel, of their productive integration—are still in place, though, as already suggested, without the nationalist rhetoric or the normalizing excesses.

Some of the change now detectable is evolutionary: Catherine Hezser's work, for example, retains an orientation toward sceptical positivism absorbed from both Cohen and Schäfer. But her utilization of network theory in her fundamentally important 1997 book on the social history of the rabbinic movement, which argues against the work of Lee Levine that the Palestinian rabbis for most of their ancient history constituted not an institutionalized class but a loosely agglomerated group, integrated mainly by informal social contacts, and interested in promoting their own legal authority by establishing relations of social dependency with other Jews, marks in my opinion a significant methodological advance (Hezser 1997; cf. Levine 1989).

A similar combination of a sceptical approach to literary sources, a desire to understand whether and how the Jews continued to function as a group under Roman rule and in what ways their experience was typical for Roman subjects and citizens in general, and an openness to experimentation with models, characterizes the work of Hayim Lapin.

Like Goodman, Lapin is unusually engaged in and knowledgeable about issues in Roman history, and has recently been making productive use of post-colonial theory in his work. His dissertation was a sophisticated attempt to contextualize a body of rabbinic economic law, and his shorter works have been characterized by keen intelligence and a concentrated and profound theoretical awareness, if also by a Certain tortuousness and over-elaborateness of exposition (Lapin 1995, 1999).

In Israel, too, there are signs of a gradual loosening of old constraints—most often achieved by scholars working outside the rabbinic mainstream. For example, since the late 1980s Hannah Cotton, an Oxford-trained Greek papyrologist teaching in the Classics Department of the Hebrew University, has been working on scattered collections of Greek, mainly legal, documents discovered in the Judaean desert in a way which has increasingly led her to challenge her colleagues' assumption that rabbinic law was normative for post-Destruction Jews (Cotton and Yardeni 1997; Cotton 1993, 1998).

Probably the most significant work of the 1990s by a young Israeli scholar is Hillel Newman's 1997 Hebrew University dissertation, written under the supervision of (p. 108) M. D. Herr, *Jerome and the Jews*. Though this work features no innovations in method and continues to subscribe, though in a greatly attenuated way, to an Alonderived rabbinocentrism, it is so thorough, comprehensive, careful, and untendentious a work that it must be regarded as one of the most important contributions to the field in recent years, and will also be a fundamental contribution to Jerome studies, if it is translated from Hebrew.

An interesting development of recent years affecting both the United States and Israel is the emergence of a group of scholars strongly influenced by postmodern literary theory. As already suggested, this group has coalesced around Daniel Boyarin, who for the first part of his career, in the 1970s and 1980s, was more or less a conventional talmudic philologist, working in Jerusalem. A drastic change in his work can be dated to 1990, with the publication of a theoretical work on midrash which has been discussed elsewhere in this volume (Chapter 6). Since then Boyarin has been not only remarkably productive, but also remarkably broad in his interests and in his willingness to master new corpora of material. He has also become increasingly engaged in the 'new historicism'—a rather diffuse literary-theoretical orientation which claims, as Boyarin himself describes it, that '... all texts [*sic*] are by definition equally credible; for the object of research is the motives of the construction of the narrative itself which is taken to attest to the political context of its telling or retelling rather than to the context of the content of the narrative. All texts inscribe the social practices within which they originate...' Most relevant here is his work, still in progress, on the relation of Judaism and Christianity in antiquity, arguing in brief that the construction of a significant discursive (and social?) separation between the two entities was primarily the work of rabbis and Church Fathers of the fourth Centuries (Boyarin 1999). Boyarin has also been a champion of gender studies, a field not completely neglected in ancient Jewish studies, but not previously pursued with much theoretical sophistication (Boyarin 1993).



Of all scholars of ancient Judaism working today, Boyarin is probably the most productively engaged with the intellectual concerns of the wider academy, in addition to having mastered all the tools traditionally valued by academic rabbinites and their ilk. It is of course impossible to predict what sort of impact he will have inside the field of ancient Judaism. He has Certainly attracted highly talented students and associates in both America and Israel—Christine Hayes (Hayes 1997)> Charlotte Fonrobert (Fonrobert 2000), Joshua Levinson (Levinson 1996), and Galit Hasan-Rokem (Hasan-Rokem 2000) may be mentioned as especially accomplished/promising—but like Neusner before him, has also generated opposition (expressed, like the opposition to Neusner, initially as obliviousness). At very least, though, Boyarin and his associates will certainly have a conspicuous place in a scholarly landscape which seems to me (perhaps only because we do not yet have the advantage of hindsight) increasingly fragmented.

### (p. 109) **Appendix: the Babylonian Diaspora**

The very extensive scholarship on the Babylonian Talmud has been surveyed elsewhere in this volume. There exist in addition small and problematic corpora of scholarship on 'rabbinic culture' and the history of the Jews in Babylonia which merit brief discussion here. The reason why this scholarship is problematic is that so little is known about late Parthian and Sassanian Babylonia—in sharp contrast to the Roman Empire in the same period—and there is furthermore next to no extra-talmudic information about the Jews. So, given the impossibility of extracting a continuous, or an episodic but detailed, history from the talmudic text itself, and the difficulty of even speculating usefully about the existence of a rabbinic group sufficiently integrated and discrete to have had its own 'culture', the argument could surely be made for maintaining a tactful silence about Babylonian Jewry before the Islamic period. Nevertheless, the best of this scholarship is interesting and provocative, and possesses a certain heuristic value as an aid to the interpretation of talmudic and gaonic texts. Anyway, extra-talmudic information, though very scarce indeed, is not wholly lacking, and the Talmud itself may not be as resistant to historical interpretation as the most determined sceptics insist, though it remains true that even the most basic historical questions elude solution.

The most comprehensive history of the Jews of Parthian and Sassanian Babylonia has been mentioned above (Neusner 1965–70)—it is characterized by a positivistic approach to the Babylonian Talmud, but also by an attempt to retrieve whatever non-rabbinic sources may be relevant to Jewish history, and also by an engagement with general historiography on the Parthian and Sassanian Empires. Subsequent work has had a narrower scope, focusing on the exilarchate (the Babylonian counterpart of the patriarchate) and on questions of inner-rabbinic history (Beer 1976), or on questions of Jewish communal organization, and relations between the rabbis and the Jewish communities (Gafni 1990; Kalmin 1999). Also noteworthy is an attempt—rather half-hearted, given its acknowledged neglect of Syriac and Graeco-Roman sources, but still useful—to produce a gazetteer of Jewish Babylonia, along the lines of S. Klein's *Sefer Ha-Yishuv* for Palestine (Oppenheimer 1983). Furthermore, very many talmudists have

glancingly attended to historical problems raised by the Talmud—but mainly as a way of explaining texts, rather than history (e.g. Friedman 1993, 1998).

Attention to 'rabbinic culture' has been a growth industry in the 1990s. This work acknowledges that the Talmud cannot be used to reconstruct Jewish culture *tout court* (as still attempted, e.g., by Stern 1994), and instead regards it as a primary ethnographic source for the partial recovery of a distinctive Jewish subculture. The best of this work (e.g. Boyarin 1993; Satlow 1995; Rubenstein 1999; Jaffee 1992, 1997) has produced real results. But, given enduring questions about the nature of the (p. 110) Talmud, the character and date of its redaction, and so on, it remains appropriate to wonder whether these results may legitimately be reified into a historical account, or must remain purely hermeneutical constructs, useful because they permit better understanding of difficult texts, while telling us rather little about the actual rabbis of Late Antique Babylonia.

## Suggested Reading

As has been suggested, there is no single work which covers the post-Destruction period in an adequate way, but there are some synthetic works which may be diffidently recommended. For Palestine, in addition to Alon (1957 and 1977); Avi-Yonah (1962 and 1981); Baras *et al.* (1982-4); Goodman (1983); Levine (1989 and 2000); and Schwartz (2001a), Cohen (1987), and Schäfer (1995), provide reliable introductions, especially for the earlier part of the period. For Babylonia, Neusner (1965-70) and Gafni (1990) may be recommended.

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### Notes:

(1) I would like to thank Marina Rustow, who has read and tremendously improved this chapter.

(2) Jacob Neusner published a monograph-length article on this topic (Neusner 1990) including, notwithstanding its title, a crudely polemical section on Israeli scholarship (pp. 83-104).

(3) On this chrestomathic zeal shared by the Wissenschaftler and the Zionists, see Bartal (1997 and 2000).

(4) This hint at the identification of the traditional Torah scholar with the modern academic may be due to the influence of Zacharias Frankel (Schorsch 1994: 191).



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(5) Graetz (1893: 1)—from the introduction to history from 70 to 1780 (my translation). Rhetorical introductory material of this sort was systematically omitted from the English translation.

(6) For criticism of a division of Jewish history into pre-exilic and exilic periods, see Biale (1986: 10-33). On Dinur, see Myers (1995: 129-50).

(7) In fact Max Weber seems to me an obvious influence both on Kaufmann's style and on the substance of his work, yet Kaufmann failed to mention him—an omission paralleled by his failure in his biblical scholarship to engage with post-Wellhausenian developments in the field (though the parallel is imperfect since unacknowledged influence is not the same as obliviousness); Silberstein (1982), in what is otherwise a helpful essay, mentions but fails to explain Kaufmann's silence about Weber; on his biblical scholarship, see Geller (1985).

(8) There are surely institutional, not only ideological, reasons for Dinur's greater influence: he began teaching at the Hebrew University much earlier than Kaufmann (1936, as opposed to 1948), and taught in the Department of Jewish History, whereas Kaufmann taught Bible: see *Encyclopedia Judaica*, sub vv.

(9) Originally published 1952-61 in Tel Aviv, by the Kibbutz Ha-Me'uhad.

(10) In my view this is undeniable, notwithstanding his students' insistence on his methodological innovation—amounting to his preference for hard-headed historical interpretations over 'soft' theological ones (see below), and his conviction that the 'historical kernel' of rabbinic stories may be recovered through comparison of alternate versions, and the adducing of non-rabbinic parallels. But neither concern was novel—though Alon perhaps applied them more systematically, and more effectively, than most.

(11) Yitzhak Baer's eulogy of Alon was printed as the preface to Alon (1959).

(12) Note the remarkable argument a fortiori in Alon 1957: 275-7 (a review of Lieberman 1942) that since most Palestinian pagans were ignorant of Greek, Jews certainly were even more so.

(13) Lieberman eventually conceded some of Alon's points without ever mentioning him or his review (Lieberman 1963; 1974: 216-34).

(14) For further discussion of this issue, see Schwartz (2001b: 335-40). On Saul Lieberman's role in this, see below, though Lieberman himself shared Alon's hostility to the Romans and in his Hebrew writing normally referred to the Roman Empire as the *malkhut resha* or *malkhut zadon*—i.e. 'the wicked kingdom'!

(15) On the Romans as 'tolerant by default', see Garnsey (1984).

(16) Unlike Alon's methods of 'reading' so as to extract historical kernels from talmudic anecdotes—criticism of which was a cornerstone of the Neusnerian revolution.

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(17) See classically Chajes's comparison of rabbinic prescriptions about how courts should operate with reports of *ma'asiyot* in the talmudim (Chajes 1899), and Alon's 'refutation' (Alon 1977: 382-6).

(18) *The Jews in Their Land* was written by his students—who obviously sensed the need for a synthetic book and had a strong enough sense of *pietas* to think that their transcriptions of Alon's university lectures would serve the purpose better than anything they could have written themselves. Later on, Safrai participated in a team project which may have been intended to replace the earlier work. See below.

(19) The most extensive account of Urbach's career and scholarship is Assaf (1993). Urbach's extensive organizational activities included chairing the Hebrew University Talmud Department and Institute of Jewish Studies, and, for twenty years, the World Union of Jewish Studies.

(20) Some of these essays have appeared in English in Urbach (1999), which also contains, on pp. xi-xvii, a brief account in English of Urbach's life. On charity, see Urbach (1951).

(21) On Urbach's self-conscious continuity with *jüdische Wissenschaft*, see J. Sussmann in Assaf (1993: 12-3). Urbach has not been without followers. His student, the polymathic Jerusalem professor Moshe David Herr, retains much of Urbach's breadth and tone, but has written relatively little. Herr's students, most prominently Oded Ir-Shai and Hillel Newman, have carved out an important niche for themselves in the crucial but little-studied field of the treatment of the Jews in the writing of the Church Fathers.

(22) The second volume, written entirely by Yoram Tsafrir, is a fundamentally important, and still highly valuable, archaeological survey. Despite the title, the first volume concerns mainly the Jews, though there are brief chapters on christianization and the Samaritans, and somewhat longer chapters on non-ethnically specific issues like administration and population size. Remarkably, there is no separate treatment of pagans, for several centuries after 135 certainly the largest element of the Palestinian population.

(23) The dominant scholars of midrash in Israel have been the late Joseph Heinemann—a form critic who was mainly interested in reconstructing the internal history of exegetical, as well as liturgical, traditions (Heinemann 1974), and Yonah Fraenkel, an unreconstructed 'new critic', who regards historical context as irrelevant to the interpretation of talmudic and midrashic narrative and exegesis (Fraenkel 1991; younger scholars, most of them trained by the above, have been less rigorously formalist). Israeli *piyyut* scholars—there are only a few non-Israeli *piyyut* scholars—have tended to combine formalism and historicism.

(24) Feliks's career is described in Y. Friedman *et al.* (1997: 7-9); a bibliography appears on pp. 11-14. Feliks published almost all his work in Hebrew, but a very brief summary of his dissertation appeared in English as 'Agriculture', *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ii. 381-98.

(25) A very similar passage appears in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ii. 396-7.

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## Historiography on the Jews in the 'Talmudic Period' (70-640 CE)

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(26) This is the name generally given to the period, beginning in 235, of extreme political instability, constant warfare, and concomitantly, the debasement of coinage and high rates of inflation.

(27) I assume this reflects the view proposed in his dissertation, which I have not been able to see.

(28) Safrai's most important work of socio-economic history (Safrai 1994) concerns only the rural Jewish population, excluding from his account even the mainly Jewish cities of Tiberias, Sepphoris, and Lydda.

(29) Safrai provided more detail in 'Godel HaUkhlosiyah Be-Eretz Yisrael Bi-Tequfah Haromit-Byzantit' (Friedman *et al.* 1997: 277-306)—proposing an average nuclear family size of 3.5 to 3.8, a population density in settled areas of 140-60 people per dunam, and a population of 2-2.5 million in cis-Jordanian Palestine, with at least 500,000 in rural Galilee.

(30) Some of Broshi's more recent work is cited above. For Finkelstein, see his 1989 and 1990 articles, and with Broshi (1992).

(31) Lieberman papers at JTS, box #16. These papers also reveal some of the tensions created for Lieberman's Israeli connections by the fact that he taught at the Jewish Theological Seminary, a non-Orthodox rabbinical school.

(32) It may be noted parenthetically here that although no discrete 'Lieberman school', comparable to the Alon school, ever developed, Lieberman too was the beneficiary of a kind of exaggerated *pietas*, slightly different from that displayed toward Alon. Lieberman's students and colleagues often talked (and talk) and wrote about him—not always ironically—in language drawn from eastern European rabbinic convention; a not quite full list of obituaries of and essays about Lieberman is provided by T. Preschel in Friedman (1993: 1-2), followed by a bibliography of Lieberman's work.

(33) Most importantly, Lieberman (1939-44, 1944, 1946). Though Lieberman wrote the overwhelming majority of his work in Hebrew, the historical pieces were all published in English.

(34) For some examples of the critical reception of these books—ranging from dazzlement to admiration mixed with scepticism—see especially the comments of Henri Grégoire quoted by Urbach (1984: 14-5), and Lewy (1944-5). On Alon's reaction, see above.

(35) Mikhail Ivanovich Rostovtzeff (1870-1950) was Professor of Ancient History first at St Petersburg and later at Yale, who wrote pioneering social and economic histories of the Hellenistic world and the Roman Empire. Lewy may have been consciously but implicitly comparing Lieberman and Alon, the Jewish Mommsen. Though Lewy was presumably familiar with it, few classicists outside Israel could read Alon's work, which

only started to be translated into English in the 1970s. I suspect that even in translation it is too hermetic to be accessible or attractive to non-Judaists.

(36) After remarking that Goodenough had failed to demonstrate the existence of an Empire-wide anti-rabbinic mystical Judaism, Smith wrote (1967: 66): '*Soit*. Columbus failed, too. But his failure revealed a new world, and so did Goodenough's.... The extent and importance of the Jewish iconic material was unrealized before Goodenough's collection of it. Informed opinions of ancient Judaism can never, henceforth, be the same as they were before he published. So long as the subject is studied and the history of the study is preserved, his work will mark an epoch.'

(37) Here we may mention, aside from the scholars to be discussed in the next sections, Judah Goldin, in various essays (Goldin 1988); Gerson Cohen, whose main concerns lay elsewhere; the books of Henry Fischel, which push Lieberman's Hellenized rabbis to an extreme (e.g. Fischel 1977); and the rather neglected work of the art historians Joseph Gutmann (e.g. Gutmann 1973, among much else) and Bernard Goldman (Goldman 1966), to name only the most conspicuous.

(38) Smith, a student at Harvard Divinity School, won a travelling fellowship to visit Palestine in 1940 and was stranded there during the Second World War, and so finished his degree in Jerusalem.

(39) Jongeling (1971)—positive but brief; Wacholder (1972)—incoherent, admiring but dismissive; Roberts (1975: a review of Neusner 1973; the earlier book was not noticed)—mainly sympathetic, but with a mild case of polite anti-Judaism, wondering why Neusner wasted so much time on discussion of rabbinic legal minutiae; Jackson (1973: review of Neusner 1970 and 1971 not reviewed in the journal). Jackson alone grasped the significance of Neusner's work. Morton Smith published what was essentially a promotional piece in 1972, recapitulated by Neusner himself in 1973: ii. 437-58.

(40) Notwithstanding the rather half-hearted defence of the topic by Neusner's student David Goodblatt, then teaching at the University of Haifa and serving, like Lee Levine, as a sort of bridge between Israel and the United States (Goodblatt 1980). By this time Neusner had demonstratively renounced history in favour of the phenomenology of religious systems (Judaisms), which he counter-intuitively thought were effectively identical with individual textual corpora—hence the series of books on 'the Judaism' of the Mishnah, the Yerushalmi, and so on. Goodblatt remained a (rather sceptical) talmudic historian even after his return to the United States.

(41) Not to mention some staggering wrong-headedness; for example (in addition to the example given in the last note) the contention, highly consequential in Neusner's work, that the rabbis were philosophers, already found in Neusner (1981). This was a dominant theme in some of his later works and led to many futile books, e.g. on the rabbis' 'economies', and on the question of why they never developed a 'science' (for in their

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taxonomic zeal the rabbis were more like Aristotle than Plato. But not every taxonomist is an Aristotelian).

(42) Who included Robert Goldenberg (see e.g. Goldenberg 1998), Baruch Bokser (see Bokser 1986; Bokser died in 1989), in addition to David Goodblatt, to list only those who were most successful at moving beyond Neusner's agenda.

(43) Levine (2000) accepts the new chronology, but it has had no effect on his presentation of the material.

(44) Presumably models are rejected because of their alleged reductionism and determinism. Certainly models have often been used poorly by ancient Judaists, among others, but it is also possible to use them with discernment and flexibility—not as reified structures into which to force the 'evidence', but as ways of subtly and carefully probing it, asking illuminating questions, and so on. For an exemplary use of social-theoretical models in a work of ancient Judaic scholarship, see Baumgarten (1997); cf. Marcus (1996).

### **Seth Schwartz**

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